

**Case 3288*****Nicrophorus tomentosus* Weber, 1801 (Insecta, Coleoptera): proposed conservation of the specific name**

D.S. Sikes

*Department of Biological Sciences, University of Calgary,  
2500 University Drive NW, Calgary, Alberta, Canada T2N 1N4  
(e-mail: dsikes@ucalgary.ca)*

S.T. Trumbo

*Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, University of Connecticut,  
Storrs, Connecticut 06269, U.S.A. (e-mail: trumbo@uconnvm.uconn.edu)*

**Abstract.** The purpose of this application, in relation to Article 23.9.3 of the Code, is to conserve the widely used specific name *Nicrophorus tomentosus* Weber, 1801 for a Nearctic species of burying beetle (family SILPHIDAE) by suppressing its assumed senior, but less frequently used, synonym *N. velutinus* Fabricius, 1801. This species is widely studied by biologists and so nomenclatural stability is particularly important.

**Keywords.** Nomenclature; taxonomy; Coleoptera; SILPHIDAE; NICROPHORINAE; *Nicrophorus tomentosus*; *Nicrophorus velutinus*; burying beetles; Nearctic.

---

1. Species of the genus *Nicrophorus* Fabricius, 1775 (p. 71) (family SILPHIDAE, subfamily NICROPHORINAE) are large, colorful beetles commonly called 'burying beetles' due to their unique reproductive strategy (interment of small vertebrate carcasses as breeding resources). These beetles have a considerable presence in the popular literature (field guides, magazines, websites, etc.) and have been the focus of intense behavioral, ecological, and conservation research over the last two decades; there were over 444 publications up to 1980 (see Sikes et al., 2002).

2. The names *Nicrophorus tomentosus* Weber, 1801 (p. 47) and *N. velutinus* Fabricius, 1801 (p. 334) were described in the same year for the same common Nearctic species of burying beetle. Fabricius (1801, p. 334) spelt the generic name *Necrophorus*, but this was an unjustified emendation of the spelling *Nicrophorus* established by Fabricius (1775, p. 71) (see Hatch, 1932; Herman, 1964).

3. Efforts have failed to establish the exact dates of publication of Weber (1801) and Fabricius (1801) based on inspection of these volumes in the library of The Natural History Museum, London. The preface of the Weber work is signed '*Scribendam Kiliae Calendis Augusti mdccc [1800]*' and the preface of the Fabricius work is marked '*Dab. Kiliae d. 10 April 1801.*' This suggests Weber's work was written, but not necessarily published, before that of Fabricius (Max Barclay, in litt., 6 December 2001).

4. Kirby (1837, p. 96) acted as First Reviser in selecting *N. velutinus* as the valid name (see Article 24.2) and LeConte (1853, p. 277) considered *N. velutinus* Fabricius